Departing N45 Sums Up Recent Progress & Thanks Navy Environmental Team for Hard Work & Support

WELCOME TO THE summer 2009 issue of *Currents*. In the past three issues of the magazine, Deputy Director John Quinn has used this column to share his insights as a relatively new member and leader of the Chief of Naval Operations Environmental Readiness (N45) team. As I approach the end of my tour here, I'd like to take this opportunity to address readers one last time and talk briefly about our successes and ongoing challenges.

Marine Mammals, Revisited

From where I sit, the most significant change we've seen over the past two years is in the area of marine mammals. With a large investment in time and research dollars, we now have the ability to study live marine mammals in the wild and see how they respond to underwater sound. When a ship is on station at our Atlantic Undersea Test and Evaluation Center (AUTEC) range or on the Southern California Offshore Range (SCORE) under the right conditions we're able to attach temporary data tags to marine mammals and use the tags, along with floor-mounted hydrophones (underwater microphones) to track how the animals respond to the sounds the ship makes.

We conduct this opportunistic research on the same ranges where we've been using sonar, and where animals have been living, for 40 years. The advantages of this are twofold: first, we're doing the studies during actual training exercises, which means the sonar use scenarios are as realistic as we can make them outside of an actual combat situation. Second, we're obtaining data from marine mammals that live, feed and breed in the range environment, so we'd expect their reactions to manmade sound to be more representative of marine mammals in those areas than captive animals under controlled conditions. This is a tremendous leap towards our goal of developing reliable data that enables us to base our exercise planning decisions on hard science rather than theories.

Environmental Planning

When I was out in the fleet, I had no idea how difficult and complex the environmental planning process can be. Today, anyone involved in planning a COMPTUEX (composite unit training exercise) or JTFEX (Joint Task Force Exercise) is aware of it because of the extreme scrutiny the court cases have brought with regard to the sonar issue.

We've come a long way on environmental planning. As recently as two years ago, the Navy and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) had never attempted large scale environmental impact statements (EIS) for at-sea training exercises. Now with the completion of the first EISs for the Atlantic Fleet Active Sonar Training (AFAST) area, the Southern California Range Complex (SOCAL), and the Hawaii Range Complex (HRC), everyone involved has been through a huge learning curve. We're presently on track to have EISs completed for all of our at-sea ranges and operating areas by next year (2010). This past June, we sat down with NMFS to coordinate the next round of EISs using the lessons we've learned to streamline processes and plan to work together effectively as cooperating agencies in the future.

As recently as two years ago, the Navy and NMFS had never attempted large scale EISs for at-sea training exercises.

Adjusting Acquisition

Environmental issues in acquisition are another area where we've made good progress. In the past, when the acquisition community would deliver a new system to the fleet, the fleet would have to determine many of the environmental impacts of that system and develop the documentation required to use it. To make life easier for the operators, we've been working to reinvigorate the acquisition process so that when a new system gets to the fleet, it's fully environmentally tested and ready to use. I believe the whole N4 (Fleet Readiness and Logistics) organization is now geared up to ensure that process goes forward smoothly.

Media Engagement

There's a lot of good news available about the great things the Navy is doing for the environment, but as everyone knows that information doesn't always get air play. Unfortunately, the vast majority of the public only know what they see in the media. What they've seen in the past has frequently been inaccurate, mainly due to the "spin" that certain people and groups with aggressive environmental agendas provide to the media. Because the science isn't yet as robust as we want it to be, they can make allegations of severe impacts that cannot be proven or disproven by the available science.

To combat this misinformation, in addition to funding the missing science, we're becoming much more vocal about the good news stories we have to tell—whether it's a ship running pollution prevention equipment, recycling on a base, or other successful projects. The Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) has taken this on as a priority, as he said when presenting the CNO environmental awards in Washington, DC both this year and last year. It's important to him and to the whole Navy. As a result of that top level attention, people realize it's OK to inform the media, reach out to non-governmental organizations (NGO), and involve local communities. As a result, we're beginning to see more Navy environmental content in the press, both as Navy generated content on Navy controlled media and in external media venues. The Chief of Information (CHINFO), N45, the fleets and regions are also working together to develop more Navy responses to negative and inaccurate coverage.

NGO Dialogue

We're also working hard to engage environmental NGOs and key stakeholders. In the past, we were hesitant to communicate about our environmental issues. With support from senior leadership, we've now done a 180 and are much more willing to share information. I believe one reason is that, with the research investment we've made and our greater commitment to environmental planning, we now have much more reliable, science-based information to share. We are increasing our dialogue with NGOs, and while we may not agree on everything, we cooperate with them on a number of issues (land buffers, data sharing) and continue to seek common ground. As examples, we're offering opportunities for NGO leaders to be interviewed in *Currents*, and are in the beginning stages of planning a Navy-NGO conference later this year to discuss environmental issues of mutual concern.

Energy Awareness

Like everyone else in the federal government today, the Navy is paying a lot of attention to energy conservation and the related issue of climate change. N4 is the executive agent for the CNO's Task Force Energy, which stood up in December 2008, and N43 (Fleet Readiness Division) leads the Navy Energy Coordination Office (NECO). They are developing approaches to reduce the Navy's carbon footprint and our dependence on fossil fuels over the long term. Through efficient use of fossil fuels and capitalizing on renewable energy sources, we'll clearly see both an operational advantage and an environmental benefit.

At the tactical level, we're already well on our way to energy efficiency in many areas. Whether it's the operators flying aircraft or driving ships in a manner that reduces fuel consumption, bases supporting cold iron ships (where ships stop running their physical plants in port and receive power services from a shore facility), or someone turning off lights in the barracks, we're finding ways to conserve energy with our legacy systems. As a recent "at-sea" technology example, the installation of stern flaps on surface ships enables ships to travel further on every gallon and saves millions of dollars in fuel every year. Wind turbines at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; photovoltaic panels on base carport roofs in San Diego; and the geothermal plant at Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake, CA illustrate that the installations are already involved, and more clean and renewable energy projects are on the way.

Thank You!

Speaking as an operator who essentially came up to speed on environmental issues from scratch in this position, I now appreciate and more fully understand what a tough job the Navy's environmental team faces. That appreciation extends to the many scientists, biologists, and others working hard outside the Navy, often under tough conditions, to obtain the data we rely upon to make good decisions. And of course, to you, the *Currents* reader. I thank you for your daily dedication to, and interest in, the Navy's mission—and your high standards for protecting the environment we all share. I wish you fair winds and following seas! ⚓

Rear Admiral Lawrence Rice
Director, Environmental Readiness Division